DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 927 CE 049 630

AUTHOR	Asselin, Susan B.
TITLE	Making the Transition: A Teacher's Guide for Helping Students with Special Needs.
INSTITUTION	American Vocational Association, Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE	87
NOTE	39p.
AVAILABLE FROM	American Vocational Association, 1410 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Resources; Daily Living Skills; *Disabilities; *Disadvantaged; *Educational Planning; *Education Work Relationship; Employment Potential; Exceptional Persons; Individualized Education Programs; Job Placement; Job Skills; Mainstreaming; Secondary Education; Skill Development; Student Needs; Student School Relationship; *Teacher Role; Vocational Education; Vocational Evaluation; Vocational Followup; Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Carl D Perkins Vocational Education Act 1984

ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help vocational education teachers prepare students with special needs to make a successful transition from school to employment. The guide is organized in five chapters. The first chapter provides a definition of transition and a model for transition from special education or vocational education to the community. In Chapter II, the various types of special needs and disadvantaged students are described. Chapter III discusses career preparation for special needs students. Elements include academic preparation, career awareness and orientation, independent living skills, vocational exploration, vocational assessment, work adjustment, vocational education, job placement, follow-up, and postsecondary education. The teacher's role in planning for special needs students to become employed is discussed in the fourth chapter. Some of the teacher's responsibilities include interagency agreements, individualized education programs, and individualized transition plans. The final chapter suggests program components that can ensure successful transitions, including community resources, vocational skill training, employability skills, work experience programs, and follow-up. A vocational special needs student follow-up questionnaire and a list of 18 references are included. (KC)

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MAKING THE TRANSITION:

A Teacher's Guide for Helping Students with Special Needs

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Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the individuals who helped to develop this publication. Nancy Miller, Graduate Assistant in Special Education Administration at Virginia Tech, provided her expertise on special education law, exceptionalities and cooperative planning in the transition process. The following people reviewed the first draft and provided recommendations: Charlotte Conaway, Senior Program Specialist, Vocational Education for the Handicapped, U.S. Department of Education; Gary Meers, Associate Professor of Special Vocational Needs, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Patricia Poplin, Virginia State Supervisor of Programs for the Mentally Retarded; Thomas Bass, Virginia Division of Rehabilitative Services Transition Coordinator; and Glenda Brown, Vocational Special Needs Program Supervisor, Portsmouth City Schools, Virginia. Their insight into the transition process for special needs students has enhanced this publication.

Foreword

Education has gone through many shifts in emphasis in its attempts to better serve the citizens of this nation. Each change has occurred to focus on a new strategy of instruction or to include a population segment that has been underserved. The move to include special needs students in vocational programming is one of these shifts in emphasis that has redirected much of the efforts of vocational educators.

Many materials have been developed and training sessions conducted to prepare vocational teachers to work with special needs students in school and work settings. Vocational teachers have gone from the stage of having a basic knowledge of the needs, interests and abilities of special needs students to the level of providing quality vocational teaching for these individuals. The next step is to gain information and strategies for transitioning special needs students from school to community settings.

The author of this publication has developed the information that can bring about the needed transition activities. She brings her years of classroom experience and consulting to her writing so that the information she shares is practical and usable.

America will be facing a shortage of workers in the years ahead, and the only way this shortage will be alleviated is by using <u>all</u> our human resources, including special needs workers. This book will help to keep the momentum going as education strives to move all of its students from school to the role of productive community citizens. This is the ultimate goal of this book and its author's philosophy.

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Chapter I Transition: An Essential Educational Goal

For many students, vocational education can make the difference between a life of independence and a life of dependence. It can play a major role in the transition process from school to work. This is particularly true for the special needs student. Special needs students are those who require special assistance or modification in instruction, materials, equipment and facilities to be successful in vocational education programs. The term "special needs" includes both handicapped and disadvantaged students. Without some form of vocational preparation and help in making successful transitions from school to work, special needs students face an uncertain future.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act states that vocational education services and activities for special needs students must supply assurances that equal access is provided in recruitment, enrollment and placement. Futhermore, these populations must have access to the full range of vocational programs available to nonhandicapped and nondisadvantaged individuals, including occupationally specific courses of study, cooperative education and apprenticeship programs. As one looks beyond secondary vocational education and toward placement in postsecondary training or the labor market, special needs students must have exposure to regular students, real work and workers.

The Act also calls for coordination between vocational and special education in planning programs for special needs students. Vocational education is charged with providing information about vocational programs and eligibility requirements for enrollment to special needs students and their parents at least one year before the students are eligible to enter vocational programs or no later than the ninth grade. All special needs students who enroll in vocational education programs must receive the following services:

- assessment of their interests, abilities and special needs with respect to successful completion of the vocational education program;

- special services, including adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment and facilities to meet individual needs;

- guidance, counseling and career development activities conducted by professionally trained counselors and

- counseling services designed to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities.

What this means for the vocational educator is that special needs students are placed in vocational programs that they are truly interested in and capable of completing. It also means that students are placed in programs with appropriate curriculum, instruction and materials designed to meet their individual needs. Support services from special education and counseling are also provided to ensure success.

Federal vocational funds are available and provide for basic costs and the cost of additional support services. Since 1979, states and local education agencies have been matching federal funds at a rate of about $2.60 for every federal dollar.

WHAT IS TRANSITION?

Transition is the process of moving students successfully from secondary education into postsecondary education or employment. Transition is a developmental process that occurs over a period of time. As an individual transfers learning from one setting to another, several factors interplay. These include family and social networks, geographic location, wage level, level of training, and job availability.

The transition from school to work is particularly important because it involves making choices with potential life-long consequences. In a study conducted in 1982, Swanson estimated that about 25 percent of all youth drop out of high school. This figure rises to nearly 55 percent in inner city schools, where students may be disadvantaged. In fact, these figures may be conservative, due to inaccurate data collection and a reluctance of schools to report such data.

Unfortunately, special needs students often get lost in the transition process and never find employment. Many receive inadequate preparation for the stresses of life beyond school. Few opportunities are available to provide them with the skills necessary to enter and remain in the labor force and to become self-sufficient, contributing members of society. If they do get jobs, they tend to be in low-paying positions with little room for advancement. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 1984 showed that only 44 percent of handicapped individuals were employed, 7 percent were unemployed, and 49 percent were not even in the labor force.

The current interest in transition in the special education sector is a direct result of the Education for Handicapped Children Act Amendments of 1983, Public Law 98-199. These

amendments provide guidelines for secondary special education and services that facilitate transition from school to work.

Thus, vocational education must work with special education, vocational rehabilitation and community service agencies to make the process of transition productive and successful for the special needs student. Vocational education teachers can play a significant role in this team approach. Two models of transition may help you to understand better the role of vocational education in this process. The first model is taken from special education, the second from vocational education.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION MODEL

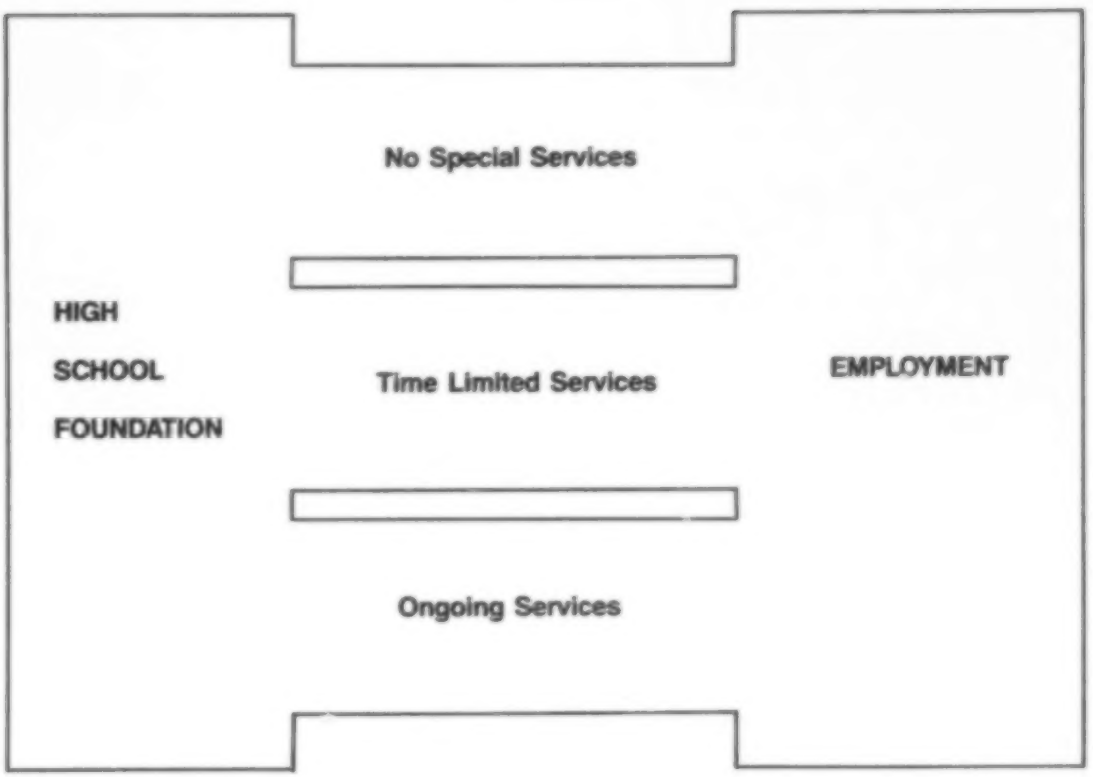
The most widely recognized model in special education was developed by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education. This model defines transition as an outcome-oriented process that begins in high school, continues through graduation, postsecondary education or adult services, and ends after the initial years in employment. The model, shown in Figure 1, consists of five components: high school, employment and the three bridges that can lead from high school to employment.

High school foundation: Special education, vocational education and other school-based services work together to provide a strong foundation in academic, vocational, social and leisure skills. It is important that vocational and special educators as a team develop an instructional program to ensure that each student leaves high school with job entry level, job-seeking and job-keeping skills. For handicapped students, the level of cooperation and the quality of the secondary program is particularly important. These factors can determine the success with which handicapped students face the transition from school to employment.

No special services: This pathway leading from school to employment is shared by both handicapped and nonhandicapped individuals. Students who follow this route obtain employment through using either their own resources or those that are available to the population at large.

Time-limited services: These temporary services include vocational rehabilitation, postsecondary vocational education and other job-training programs. Typically, these services are restricted to individuals thought capable of making it on their own once the services end. For handicapped students, vocational rehabilitation is the best-known time-limited service. Any individual with an employment-related disability is qualified for rehabilitation services if employment is deemed a reasonable goal at the end of the service.

Figure 1. OSERS transition model.



Ongoing services: Handicapped individuals receive ongoing adult services that provide whatever support is needed to secure and maintain employment. For example, students may be employed at a sheltered workshop or day activity center. Most sheltered workshops involve clients in supervised, contract work such as collating and stuffing envelopes, recycling, manufacturing or assembly. Day activity programs provide a more structured environment where social and leisure skills are developed in conjunction with minimal work skills.

Employment: Employment opportunities are essential for successfully completed transition. Otherwise, a handicapped individual may graduate from a secondary program only to discover that no employment opportunities are available. Labor issues such as minimum wage levels, equal opportunity employment and employer incentives must be given adequate attention.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRANSITION MODEL

An individual's career choice and employment result in decisions that affect family, personal life, social status, personality and chance factors. Campbell, Gardner and Winterstein at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education define transition from school to work in terms of pathways. Pathways are common avenues that individuals use to enter the labor market. The pathways available to young people are numerous. The process begins in high school with the selection and completion of the curriculum. Upon graduation, the individual must make another choice--either to work, to enter a postsecondary institution or to delay making a choice. The individual continues along the pathway making choices where necessary until work becomes the major activity.

Pathways are characterized by four major areas of consideration:

- the process of education;
- entry-level jobs;
- the availability of choices in education and employment and
- factors that determine these choices.

The choices an individual makes are influenced by the complex interaction of existing opportunities. For example, in high school, differences in the educational process occur because of the type of curriculum followed, the quality of the program and the extent of the individual's involvement in the program. The pathway a student chooses is partly determined by academic achievement in school. In addition, parents and peer groups have an important influence on career choice. In postsecondary

education, pathways of transition vary by type of institution, degree earned and length of program studied. The individual must choose not only among alternative educational processes but among alternative jobs.

The vocational education transition model is based on findings from a study of factors contributing to the selection of a pathway. Factors studied included the frequency of delay, interruption, sequence and degree, as well as socioeconomic status, aspirations, race and gender. The study indicated that young adults with little or no postsecondary education or training felt that the jobs they held were unrewarding. In addition, they experienced a sense of loss of control over their lives. These individuals were predominantly represented by females and black males of low-to-middle socioeconomic status. Career indecision was common. In contrast, completing a training program had a significant effect on acquiring jobs and on career advancement. These individuals also had higher self-esteem.

The results of this study suggest that vocational education is an integral part of the transition process. Vocational education offers training in occupational and employability skills that provide students with certain advantages as they enter selected transition pathways.

Chapter II Who Are Special Needs Students?

As a vocational educator you work daily with special needs students. You may have a headstart on many of your colleagues and be familiar with the types of students that fall into this category. However, if you, like many vocational educators, are uncertain about who special needs students are, this chapter offers definitions, descriptions and explanations of handicapping conditions, in addition to definitions and eligibility criteria for disadvantaged students.

What are your chances of having a special needs student in your vocational classroom? The National Center for Education Statistics reported the 1980-81 vocational special needs student enrollments by category and program area. The total enrollments of special needs students in vocational education were 3.3 percent handicapped, 15.2 percent disadvantaged and 1 percent limited English proficient. Thus, 19.5 percent of the total enrollment in vocational education consisted of special needs students.

Table 1 contains enrollment information by program area and special need category. Approximately 64 percent of special needs students were enrolled at the secondary level, and the remaining 36 percent were served in postsecondary programs. Thirty-seven percent of the special needs students were enrolled in occupationally-specific programs and completed these programs at approximately the same rate as all vocational education students. At the secondary level, 11.3 percent of the special needs students were served in mainstreamed vocational classes with no support, 68.1 percent were mainstreamed with support and 20.6 percent were served in separate programs.

HANDICAPPED

The term "handicapped" refers to an individual who performs below average in mental, physical or social settings, or in all three, and who requires special education and rehabilitative services in order to enter the job market. Here is a description of the various handicapping conditions defined in The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.O. 94-142. If you need more information on these handicapping conditions, your special education teacher will be able to provide assistance.

Mentally retarded students have below average intelligence. There are varying degrees of mental retardation ranging from educable to severe/profound.

Table 1. Enrollment Data of Vocational Special Needs Students*

Program Area	Handicapped	Disadvantaged	LEP
Agriculture	3.7	14.7	.7
Distribution	1.8	11.3	.0
Health Occupations	1.4	11.3	.8
Occupational Home Economics	6.1	22.2	1.5
Office Education	2.5	14.1	1.2
Technical Education	1.7	14.9	2.2
Trade & Industrial	3.4	14.7	.9
Consumer & Homemaking	2.8	17.0	.9
Industrial Arts	2.5	9.0	.9
Other	10.0	29.0	1.0
Total Enrollment	3.3	15.2	1.0

*SOURCE: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Vocational Education Data System, May 3, 1983, Table 1109

Students who are educable mentally retarded have IQ scores around 50 to 69 and exhibit adaptive behaviors below their age levels. The major aim in educating these students is to help them adjust to the community as social participants and wage earners. Trainable mentally retarded students have IQ scores ranging from 35 to 50 and display deficient adaptive behavior. The emphasis in educating these students is to develop independent living skills and the potential for competitive employment.

Severely retarded students have markedly subnormal intelligence and require some degree of supervision throughout their lives. These students are taught physical, occupational and speech therapy in addition to vocational skills that prepare them for employment in an enclave, supported work or sheltered workshop setting.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing conditions are differentiated according to degrees of hearing loss. Both adversely affect the student's educational performance. Deafness means that amplification cannot help the student to hear spoken language, while the hard-of-hearing student may understand language with or without a hearing aid. With hearing aides, speech, speed reading and auditory training, most hard-of-hearing students can follow a regular curriculum. The deaf student, unable to develop speech and language through hearing, needs more specialized educational techniques.

Speech or language impaired refers to a communication disorder. Speech defects include stuttering, impaired articulation or a language or voice impairment. These students profit from either group or individual therapy by speech clinicians.

Visually handicapped includes both partially sighted and blind students. The partially sighted student, after correction, has less than 20/70 acuity in the better eye, while the blind person has an acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye after correction. Partially sighted students can follow the regular curriculum but may need special assistance. Blind students need special methods of instruction, materials and equipment that uses the auditory and tactile senses.

Seriously emotionally disturbed is a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors; b) an inability to establish or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or adults; c) inappropriate behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression and e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The key to understanding these characteristics is that they are both intense and displayed over a long period of time. The emotionally disturbed student benefits from an environment in which the emotional climate and behavioral controls are designed to promote appropriate classroom behavior and to develop adequate social skills.

Orthopedically impaired includes severe physical disabilities that interfere with the normal functioning of muscles, bones or joints. This category includes students with congenital disorders such as dislocated hips, clubfeet and spina bifida, as well as students who have a crippling condition because of accidents or infections such as cerebral palsy, poliomyelitis, burns and fractures. Emphasis is placed on changing the physical environment to facilitate the educational program.

Other health impaired categories include **chronic or acute health problems** that render students relatively inactive and may adversely affect their educational performance. Conditions such as diabetes, hemophilia, asthma or leukemia are included in this category. Students with chronic or acute health problems learn like other students, but instruction is adapted to provide for reduced strength, vitality or attention span.

Specific learning disabilities involve a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes that involve understanding or using language, either written or spoken. This may mean that students have problems in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling or in mathematical calculations.

Students with learning disabilities may have difficulty remaining seated or attending to lessons for extended periods of time, have difficulty copying notes from the blackboard, and have trouble remembering directions or understanding written or spoken words. Modifications must be made to accommodate individual needs and styles of learning.

DISADVANTAGED

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act provides more specific guidelines for the **academically disadvantaged**. Any one or combination of these standards may be used by a school district to determine eligibility. More specifically, the Act defines **economically disadvantaged** students as those who, because of economic or academic disadvantages, cannot be successful in a regular vocational program without special services or assistance. According to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, P.L. 98-524, the term "disadvantaged" includes individuals who are members of economically disadvantaged families, migrants, or who have limited English proficiency. It also includes individuals who are dropouts or have been identified as potential

dropouts from secondary school. The rules and regulations of this law outline standards for eligibility.

Academically disadvantaged students may score at or below the 25th percentile on a standardized achievement or aptitude test. They may earn secondary school grades that are below 2.0 (when a grade of "A" equals 4.0). Though they may fail to attain minimal academic competencies, they are not necessarily learning disabled. What this means is that these students perform well below the norm in achievement and aptitude for their grade level. Furthermore, this learning problem is due to learning problems that are affected by academic background rather than an identified learning disability.

The other group described in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, economically disadvantaged students, are characterized by one or more of the following standards. They may have an annual income at or below national poverty level. They may be eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches and for Aid to Families with Dependent Children or other public assistance programs. They may be recipients of a Pell Grant or other programs of need-based financial assistance. Finally, they may be eligible for participation in programs assisted under Title II of the Job Training Partnership Act. It is important to realize that meeting the criteria for eligibility for economically disadvantaged does not automatically mean that the student needs special services or assistance to be successful. These standards may or may not be a factor in learning.

Chapter III Career Preparation for Special Needs Students

Career preparation for special needs students is an important component of the high school foundation necessary for successful transition from school to work. This process includes functional academics, independent living, career education, vocational education and support services such as vocational assessment and work adjustment. A limited number of schools have fully implemented all components of career preparation. Unless your school district has a strong career education program, however, students may not be exposed to the world of work until they enter secondary school. Although this is common, for special needs students it is essential that such instruction begin as early as elementary school to help them make the eventual transition from school to work. From preschool through secondary education, special education, remedial reading, remedial math and bilingual education teachers should be involved in career preparation of special needs students.

This comprehensive process is necessary to help special needs students overcome barriers that they have been confronted with in the past. These barriers include such things as a traditional academic curriculum not related to the world of work, lack of opportunity for vocational exploration and training, placement in jobs not matched to student interest and abilities, lack of follow-up on the job, menial or dead-end jobs and high unemployment or underemployment.

This chapter describes, in more detail, the steps essential in the career preparation process. The process is both sequential and continuous. Individual students may progress at their own rates irrespective of age or grade level identified. This varies due to the severity of the learning problem, availability of components and quality of programs. Figure 2 shows those people responsible for each component of the career preparation process.

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Academic preparation involves developing the basic skills that are the primary focus of elementary education. Skills in math, reading, language and communication can provide special needs students with the tools necessary to be successful in the world of work. These skills should be functional and related to work as early as kindergarten.

Along with basic academic skills, students need to develop social competence. Opportunities to socialize with other children are extremely important. Special needs students should be integrated with their nonhandicapped peers as early and as frequently as possible.

CAREER AWARENESS AND ORIENTATION

Early exposure to career education can help elementary-level students not only to develop positive attitudes and values about work, but also to understand the important role these will play in ensuring later success in life. Learning about the world of work and the types of jobs that people perform helps students to explore how they perceive themselves as workers and to develop interests in relation to specific occupational areas. Once an awareness and interest in an occupation is developed, students can learn more about the job requirements and how they would develop their own abilities and skills to be successful in the occupation.

In addition, by learning about the different types of occupational roles, children at this stage can begin to develop decision-making skills. They can develop positive work attitudes and values as well as respect for others and the kind of work they do.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

The skills needed to survive in the home and community are often overlooked in educating special needs students. Yet these skills are essential because they enable the student to function independently. Students need experiences in developing basic home living skills, consumer skills and family living skills. These skills can be taught from kindergarten through high school.

VOCATIONAL EXPLORATION

During the junior high years, students begin to think about careers that will meet their individual needs, interests and abilities. Realizing that they are responsible for eventually finding a career, they begin to make tentative plans. They may enroll in technology education, home economics or business education for short-term, hands-on activities related to occupations. Activity-oriented instruction provides them with opportunities to practice problem-solving skills and appropriate work behaviors. In addition, students may develop an understanding of basic concepts of economics and how these concepts affect careers, society and lifestyles. At this point, the student begins to think about careers that meet individual needs,

Figure 2. Career preparation process personnel responsibilities.

1. Academic Preparation

Elementary and Secondary Teachers:
- Regular Education
- Remedial Education
- Billingual Education
- Special Education

Parent/Guardian

2. Career Awareness and Orientation

Elementary and Secondary Teachers:
- Special Education

School Counselor
Parent Guardian

3. Independent Living Skills

Special Education Teacher
Parent/Guardian

4. Vocational Exploration

Vocational Teacher
Special Education Teacher
Vocational Special Needs Teacher

5. Vocational Assessment

Vocational Teacher
Special Education Teacher
School Psychologist

6. Work Adjustment

Vocational Evaluator
Vocational Special Needs Teacher
Rehabilitation Personnel
Special Education Teacher

7. Vocational Education

Vocational Teacher
Vocational Special Needs Teacher
Rehabilitation Personnel
Special Education Teacher

8. Job Placement

Vocational Teacher
Job Specialist
Rehabilitation Personnel
Vocational Special Needs Teacher
Cooperative Education Teacher

9. Follow-up

Vocational Teacher
Rehabilitation Personnel
Special Education Teacher
Vocational Special Needs Teacher

10. Postsecondary Education

Vocational Teacher
Counselor
Student Services Director
Rehabilitation Counselor
Social Worker/Care Worker

interests and abilities. One of the ways of accomplishing this is to initiate a program of vocational assessment in addition to exploring careers in vocational classrooms.

VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Conducting a vocational evaluation helps school personnel to decide upon placement and training that meets the interests and abilities of the learner. It can identify and measure individual strengths and weaknesses that will affect specific occupational areas. For example, individuals differ in their work skills, dexterities, aptitudes, rates of performance, vocational interests, work behaviors, attitudes and physical capacities.

There are many devices designed to measure manual dexterity, aptitudes, interests, work behavior, skill performance and attitudes. Students may undergo testing provided through a school district or outside agency such as vocational rehabilitation for anywhere from one day to four weeks. It is important that the assessment be administered by qualified personnel.

During the junior high years, the evaluation can determine interests and aid in exploring careers. It can help to determine what remedial services may be needed to ensure success in a particular occupation, or which types of instruction may be successful. At the senior high level, emphasis is placed upon work performance, work habits, attitudes and physical capabilities. The evaluation is occupationally specific, and the results are used for placement in a vocational program.

Counseling is based on the assessment results. Sometimes the evaluation process reveals problems in behavior or attitude that may prevent the student from succeeding in a vocational training program. In this case, the evaluation team may recommend work adjustment.

WORK ADJUSTMENT

Special needs students often exhibit behavior that can inhibit their success in a vocational training program or on the job. These inappropriate behaviors may be identified during vocational exploration, vocational assessment or in a vocational training program. Work adjustment programs are an educational tool that can help these students. These programs are designed to orient an individual to the world of work, develop prevocational or employability skills and eliminate behavioral problems that may interfere with work. Individuals may be enrolled on a short- or long-term basis, depending on needs.

Work adjustment may involve counseling and behavioral modification while in a supervised job setting, or modification of the environment or job to meet the needs of the individual student. As vocational teachers, you need to work with special education teachers to make the modifications necessary to help special needs students learn. When the student exhibits appropriate behavior, a vocational education program is recommended.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

By the time that special needs students reach senior high school they have developed individual abilities, aptitudes and interests. They have some knowledge of career opportunities. Now they are ready to learn to cope with the discipline of work. Vocational education can help students gain entry-level competencies that will allow them to find employment in a specific occupational area. Students must assume the responsibility for implementing a career plan.

Deciding which vocational area to enter should be based upon career exploration, vocational assessment and work adjustment experiences. School personnel can provide guidance and counseling to help in this decision. You can provide information on specific vocational program requirements and competencies.

JOB PLACEMENT

Upon graduation students assume the role of wage earner. The school may provide assistance in placing them in entry-level jobs. Once employed, students must apply the problem-solving and independent living skills they have acquired to their real-life work situation.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up provides schools with information about the relevance and quality of instruction as related to specific occupations. Follow-up leads to program improvement and ensures the high quality of the instructional program. By determining the satisfaction of the student and the employer, the school can determine the appropriateness of its vocational training and job placement activities.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Upon leaving secondary education, special needs students have a variety of options--to continue their education at a

college or university, to enroll in a trade school, vocational technical center or community college, or to enter the world of work. The secondary education program should prepare students to make a decision and offer some support services to guide them. Special needs students need to link with agencies that provide these support services.

As an adult, special needs students may be served by social service, rehabilitation, employment or other community agencies. You may be able to refer students to the appropriate agency prior to their leaving secondary education. Then the agency will become responsible for assisting them. It is extremely important that these services help the "whole" person and include personal and family counseling, residential assistance, legal services and consumer assistance as well as help in finding employment.

If all of these components are included in the educational foundation from kindergarten through high school graduation, then selection of a postsecondary program or employment will be made based upon the actual interests and abilities of special needs students. Well-planned educational programs for special needs students result in successful transition from school to work or postsecondary programs.

Chapter IV Your Role in Planning

The extent to which special needs students succeed in vocational programs and become employed depends a great deal on the cooperative efforts of professionals within a given high school. Before students enter a vocational program, planning is conducted by these professionals to ensure that appropriate services such as vocational assessment, career counseling, supplemental services and job placement opportunities will be provided to every disadvantaged and handicapped student.

Vocational education teachers are team members in a cooperative planning process that may include the following individuals:

- School personnel
  - vocational teachers
  - regular academic teachers
  - special education teachers
  - administrators
  - vocational resource or support educators
  - guidance or career counselors
  - vocational evaluators
  - vocational rehabilitation counselors
- Business and industry representatives
- Vocational advisory council
- Parents or guardians
- Advocacy groups
- Community-based organizations

Specific roles and responsibilities of team members will vary according to the school and the availability of personnel and programs. Responsibilities could also be affected by previously established state and local interagency agreements.

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

The responsibility of ensuring that special needs students successfully make the transition from school to work is too large for any one teacher, organization or agency. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act contains an extensive initiative that

encourages vocational education to develop effective programs and relationships among community-based organizations and the private sector.

In recognition of the need for collaborative efforts among agencies, recent federal initiatives have urged those receiving federal funding to begin developing and implementing cooperative agreements. Through interagency agreements, duplication and gaps in services are identified among agencies, and services are more likely to be shared in a cost-effective manner.

In order to provide special needs students with appropriate vocational opportunities and transition assistance, many states have developed comprehensive cooperative agreements. These agreements generally consist of a commitment by vocational education, special education and vocational rehabilitation to work together to achieve maximum vocational opportunities for all special needs individuals. In addition, the agreement delineates the roles and responsibilities to be provided by each service agency.

Likewise, local education agencies are developing cooperative agreements. Local vocational education, special education and vocational rehabilitation staff work together to determine how services can more effectively be delivered within their community, and what specific roles and responsibilities will be assumed by each agency.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

One way in which you can play a vital role in the transition process at the high-school level is by helping to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is essentially a written document between the school and the parents or guardian. Public Law 94-142 mandates that each handicapped student be provided with an IEP. This plan guides the student from elementary school through high school. If a student is determined eligible, then a meeting will be held to determine the specific educational goals and objectives for that student. The IEP must include the following information:

- present educational performance level of the student;
- specific annual goals and short-term objectives;
- specific educational services, including the extent to which the student will participate in regular educational programs;
- special modifications needed for the student to participate in vocational programs;

- projected dates for initiation and completion of services;

- evaluation procedures and schedules for determining whether instructional objectives have been met.

It is important that you become an active member of the IEP team before a placement decision is made. Often, vocational education teachers are not told which students have special learning problems until the semester is well underway. In addition, many special education teachers have no idea what is involved in a vocational program. You need to give them information about your vocational courses such as requirements, basic academic prerequisites, curriculum, teaching style, evaluation methods, types of equipment, environmental conditions and course competencies. Sharing this information will help the placement committee to determine the best possible setting and level of instruction for each special needs student.

You can also provide informal types of assessment particular to your vocational area. Many vocational teachers administer pretests, interest inventories and skill performance tests at the beginning of a course. If administered before placement, this type of data can be useful in making the placement decision. If a special needs student expresses an interest in a specific vocational area, then you might want to allow that student to attend a class to try out some of the skills.

INDIVIDUALIZED TRANSITION PLAN

Although not required by law, some school districts are developing the transition component as they develop an education program for each student. While the IEP focuses upon academic achievement and related behavioral skills, the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) is more comprehensive. It includes annual goals and short-term objectives that encompass all aspects of vocational and personal development. Objectives that could be included in an ITP are vocational competence, job-seeking and job-keeping skills, personal and social skills, recreation and leisure skills, and community and independent living skills. Figure 3 shows a possible format for an ITP.

The ITP should be developed while the special needs student is still in a secondary program. This permits the service providers to complete goals within the school setting and to make plans for the student's eventual transition from school to work and independence. The special educator may initiate the ITP during the junior or senior year as a supplement to the IEP. It may serve as the vocational component of the IEP as well. While

Figure 3. Individualized transition plan.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Career goal(s): _____

Vocational assessment results: _____

Area	Goals	Service Provider
OCCUPATIONAL/VOCATIONAL	Vocational Training Work Habits and Attitudes	Vocational Education Teacher
INDEPENDENT LIVING	Consumer Skills Self-Care Community Living	Rehabilitation Personnel Home Economics Teacher
PERSONAL/SOCIAL	Self-Confidence Interpersonal Skills Sexuality Communication	Family Services Personnel Counselor
RECREATION/LEISURE	Intramurals Clubs Service Organizations Special Olympics	Physical Education Teacher YMCA Lion's Club

disadvantaged students are not the responsibility of special educators, the process for developing the ITP can be duplicated by vocational teachers or counselors and used for these students. Responsibility may be determined on a school-by-school basis.

More people are involved in developing an ITP since community agencies and service providers are active in the lives of disadvantaged and handicapped individuals. As part of this team, you can help to develop and implement this plan for your special needs students. As students receive the appropriate vocational training and job placement through the vocational program, the team can coordinate community and adult services that they will require for eventual independence.

While special education takes the lead role in developing the ITP at the secondary level, vocational rehabilitation often provides services at the postsecondary level. (This plan is sometimes called an Individual Work Rehabilitation Plan.) As transition goals are developed, vocational rehabilitation and special education personnel are aided by vocational educators and other school personnel. In addition, service providers outside the school setting may participate, such as local offices of mental retardation/mental health, visual disabilities or hearing impaired services, adult services such as social services for the disadvantaged, and community assistance programs.

A list of steps that can help you contribute to the planning process for special needs students follows:

1. Develop a positive working relationship with your school's special education staff.

2. Ensure that special needs students are identified for you before they are placed in your classroom.

3. Provide the special education teacher with informal assessment data.

4. Review students' academic, social and medical histories.

5. Bring vocational expertise into the decision-making process in the IEP and help to develop the ITP.

6. Plan to provide special vocational training, work experience, vocational student organization opportunities and employability skills.

Chapter V Ensuring Successful Transitions

Because special needs students require more support and specialized instruction than others, vocational education is especially critical in order to provide them with the skills necessary for an effective transition from school to work. This chapter shows how you can make certain that your special needs students will come through the transition process successfully.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Community-based organizations and advisory councils can offer numerous supplemental vocational service unavailable to vocational education teachers in the school setting. Regularly talk to members of advisory committees and councils. They can help you to plan, implement and maintain instructional programs for special needs learners. Ask them for advice concerning appropriate program objectives, curriculum content and occupation competencies that need to be included in a program. Advisory councils can identify entry-level job proficiencies and offer advice concerning equipment and facilities modification. In addition, they can provide the contact with employers necessary to place your students in actual jobs.

Local organizations may provide such services as career counseling, tutoring, recreation and job training. Civic organizations and interest groups generally offer legal aid, scholarship programs, transportation and holiday entertainment. By identifying and using all services and resources in the area, you will improve and increase educational and training options for your special needs students.

Implementing the goals and objectives developed by cooperative planning is an area in which you can make a significant contribution. Your expertise in developing the competence of special needs students will eventually help to provide these students with job placement when they graduate. Thus, developing a sound vocational education curriculum for special need students is essential. This curriculum should include vocational skill training, employability skills, simulated work experience and actual on-the-job training.

VOCATIONAL SKILL TRAINING

The most obvious contribution that you can make is helping your students to develop specific vocational skills. The competency-based nature of vocational education lends itself to individualized instruction. In a competency-based program students move through a sequence of tasks at their own pace and are able to develop skills at an increasing level of competence. At the same time, vocational instruction involves learning personal development and social interaction skills, as well as skills in seeking and keeping jobs in specific occupations. Vocational instruction also offers students opportunities to develop leadership and social skills through student organizations such as Vocational Industrial Clubs of America and Future Farmers of America.

Here are some specific ways in which you can make certain that your special needs students will acquire appropriate vocational skills:

1. Allow for open-entry and open-exit into vocational courses and for extended time arrangements. Special needs students benefit from individualized learning packets designed to develop basic skills covered early in a course, such as safety or measurement. This permits them to catch up with the rest of the class and reinforces learning of basic skills. Often, special needs students may need more time than others to complete assignments. This can be done in the vocational lab or in the classroom with assistance from special education teachers.

2. Have appropriate tools and equipment available and adapt or modify them to meet individual needs. When tools or equipment need to be adapted, the first resource is the student. Students know their learning problems or physical barriers better than anyone else. Professionals such as a rehabilitation engineer or mobility instructor may offer suggestions and actually provide the needed adaptations. Resources from rehabilitation publications and materials development centers such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Stout are also available.

3. Provide as many hands-on relevant vocational experiences as possible. Special needs students tend to be concrete learners. They often have a difficult time transferring skills from one place to another. Therefore, vocational instruction must include activity-oriented learning activities that are actual work. For example, instead of written work sheets on measurement, have students use "real" measuring tools and "real" items.

4. Work with other school personnel, such as a special education or remedial teacher, in relating curriculum to the vocational program. Academic instruction from special or

remedial teachers can readily relate to the vocational program that special needs students are enrolled in. For example, there are a multitude of reading programs related to the world of work that can reinforce vocational instruction. You can provide vocational vocabulary, safety skills or measurements to reinforce skills basic to academic courses.

5. Check to see that facilities are barrier free. For example, will a student in a wheelchair be able to get to the classroom by elevator, or are there only stairs? Once again, the first people to ask about ways to remove barriers are the special needs students themselves. Accessibility to a vocational lab may involve adding ramps, warning lights or bells, raising or lowering work stations or equipment, or making wider aisles.

6. Modify materials and methods including type, duration, sequence and content of units. Special education or vocational resource teachers can help to make these modifications. If the instructional materials or methods are not effective for special needs students, then they need to be adapted to meet learning styles or ability level. Instead of lecture and notetaking, use demonstrations or small-group activities. The key here is to teach special needs students in the way they learn the best!

7. Monitor each student's progress on a regular basis. Special needs students need to know what is expected and where they stand in relation to these expectations. They also need structured learning and immediate reinforcement. Checklists, progress charts, skills charts and individual conferences can assist in the monitoring process.

8. Remember that you are part of a team. If you encounter specific problems that you can't resolve or have unanswered questions, consult other team members. You may also be consulted by special education teachers for expertise in your vocational area. Make an effort to spend time talking to team members on a regular basis. Share the positive experiences of your special needs students and be open to team members' suggestions.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Much of the literature on employment of special needs students suggests that jobs are most often lost due to inappropriate social skills rather than to the lack of specific vocational skills. In the daily course of vocational instruction students need to learn about appropriate dress for the job, punctuality, cooperation, listening to supervisors, following directions, and safety and emergency procedures. At the same time, students need to learn how to cope with failure and to handle job-related stress.

Silberman, in Education and Work, encourages vocational teachers to improve the quality of student learning environments by teaching intrinsic qualities. These qualities include personal competence, aesthetic expression, integrity, cooperation and a sense of altruism.

If students experience control over their physical and social environment, then they have an opportunity to explore personal competence within that environment. Vocational education offers students a unique opportunity to be creative in a variety of laboratory experiences. Students experience satisfaction and fulfillment when a product is created as an aesthetic expression. Whenever special needs students enroll in regular vocational classrooms, they are exposed to role models that can instill a sense of integrity in work. Students need to learn to do the job the right way and develop an appreciation for quality in their work.

Vocational education also provides students with opportunities to work with other students on projects and to develop a sense of teamwork and cooperation. This is particularly important in light of the emphasis on individualized instruction that may restrict a student's exposure to peers. Cooperation is essential to the world of work no matter what type of job one has. Finally, vocational education teachers need to instill a sense of altruism. Altruism is, basically, helping out your fellow human beings by providing some type of community service. Many of the class projects that students attempt in vocational programs make a contribution to the school and community. This sense of accomplishment and extension of oneself is important to personal development as well.

Employability skills are essential for success on a job. If students are not taught these skills while they are developing vocational competencies, then they will have a difficult time adapting to the world of work. As you review employability skills, you can begin to see how your vocational program can offer these competencies at the same time that vocational skills are being learned.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Providing students with work experience not only bridges the gap between vocational education and the world of work, but also provides opportunities for special needs students to apply learned skills in an actual job setting. A study conducted in 1982 of mild-to-moderately handicapped high school students who had graduated from vocational programs in Vermont indicated that their employment prospects were greatly enhanced by part-time employment while in a high school program. This is particularly important for special needs students, many of whom cannot be

reached through traditional vocational training programs or in academically-oriented regular education programs. Work experience programs can offer vocationally related academics in a realistic setting and at the same time equip students with mature work habits and attitudes.

Simulated work programs simulate work environments in controlled settings. These programs involve unpaid work and may take place in a classroom or laboratory in the school. Vocational teachers may supervise students as they learn janitorial, housekeeping or groundskeeping skills. Often teachers develop a production or assembly line to simulate a manufacturing process. Although simulated programs tend to stress general work skills, rather than skills needed only for a specific occupation, it is important for special needs students that the simulated experiences have some relation to available and appropriate occupations.

In these simulated programs, student behavior and performance are carefully monitored by staff who provide concurrent personal and career counseling. Typically, students are helped to develop positive attitudes toward work and appropriate work behaviors. They develop a better understanding of the value and demands of work, as well as functional capacities that will help them to select appropriate vocational education and work options.

It is important to provide special needs students with on-the-job training in the actual occupation they are preparing for while they are still enrolled in a vocational program. This can be either paid or unpaid work, and the job may continue once the student has graduated. Students may work after school, or spend half a day at school, the other half at the job. Job placement assists students in applying knowledge in actual situations and bridges the difficulty that many experience in transferring skills from the classroom to the workplace. Thus, by the time that students assume the role of wage earners, they will have learned to apply problem-solving and independent living skills.

Student placement on a job is accomplished with prior planning and preparation. How can you go about finding businesses and industries willing to provide work experience to your special needs students? First, you need to develop a local business and industry resource directory. For example, you can analyze the job market in your local newspapers to find out what kinds of work these employers offer. Make contact and establish cooperation with business and industry leaders with potential on-the-job training sites. You may want to ask an advisory council to put you in contact with an interested employer, or you could contact employers where former students have been placed successfully. Explain how work experience will further reinforce the skills being taught in your specific vocational program.

In addition to providing students with specific work experience, business and industry can offer advice on relevant program content, local labor market statistics, potential on-the-job training sites and job simulations. Their employees can serve as role models for special needs students, particularly if they are handicapped themselves.

Regardless of which job or setting you end up selecting, you must be fully aware of the interests and abilities of each student, and match these to the requirements of the job and the work environment. Data acquired through vocational assessment and performance in a vocational program can assist in determining student abilities. Job requirements and work environment may best be determined by on-site visits, observations and interviews with workers. A job analysis detailing tasks or describing the environmental requirements can be used to match the student to the job.

The availability of the teacher or a job placement counselor to provide initial support of the student is a major positive reason for employers to hire special needs students. The teacher or counselor can assist the employer in making adaptations if needed and can work with co-workers to better understand the student. Information gained from observing the student at the work site can also be used to remediate basic skills and re-inforce new skills back in the classroom.

It is extremely important to maintain open communication between yourself and the employer. During the first weeks, daily contact must be maintained until the student is ready for more independence. As the student becomes more competent and self confident, you can decrease the number of visits to the employer. However, be sure the employer knows that you are always available and willing to help.

Here are some strategies that you can use to help your special needs students function in work experience programs:

1. Monitor their performance and behavior regularly. This may involve spending time with the student on the job site, assisting in completing assigned work, offering suggestions for time management or adapting techniques or equipment. As the student becomes more skilled and begins to work independently, you can start phasing out continuous monitoring, from daily to weekly visits.

2. Assist them as needed in areas such as work habits and attitudes and job-related social and personal skills. Generalizing skills from the class or laboratory to the workplace is difficult for special needs students. Interpersonal interactions with co-workers or supervisors is an area that is especially hard. It may help to talk to the student's co-workers on the

job, as well as to the supervisor, so that the student's expectations and abilities are known by all involved.

3. Identify problems students may experience that can be remediated in the vocational or academic classroom. If a student experiences difficulty in measurement, speed, accuracy or reading, for example, work with the student on those skills back in the classroom.

4. Offer assistance to the employer by suggesting ways to adapt equipment or techniques to accommodate students. Employers appreciate suggestions from teachers or students for no- or low-cost environmental accommodations and techniques for completing tasks. Simple accommodations may include adding electrical switches, ramps, and cut outs in counters, or padding equipment.

5. Work with employers to help them understand the behaviors and abilities of your special needs students. Before your students are placed in a job, discuss their skills or abilities. If the employer is fearful, you can alleviate these fears by assuring the employer that the students will be closely monitored by you.

FOLLOW-UP

Once a student is placed on a job, your role should not end. Too often vocational teachers leave follow-up to administrators. Unfortunately, administrators may ask more general questions than would be helpful to specific vocational programs. Monitoring student performance and behavior on the job yourself will help you to identify problems and correct them immediately. In addition, you can address concerns of the employer and help students make adaptations as needed.

Follow-up may be conducted by a teacher, placement counselor or social service worker. Once a student leaves secondary education, adult service agencies may conduct follow-up. School districts often administer follow-up of all students two to five years after a student leaves school, so you could use the data gathered from this established process, or conduct your own follow-up. Schools generally keep records of students' home addresses, and if students are no longer living at the same address, parents generally know where they have gone.

If you decide to conduct the follow-up yourself, use a survey or telephone interview to gather follow-up data. Questions concerning employment status, job satisfaction, duties and wages may be helpful. You may want to ask students about their level of satisfaction with their vocational training, and if it helped them either to get a job or to become successful in their current job. If they are unemployed, ask if the school could

have done anything differently to help them while enrolled. What changes should be made in procedures, content of instruction or services? Figure 4 shows a sample questionnaire.

If possible, conduct follow-up of employers as well to get their advice on whether the vocational program is working and how program content could be improved. Interview them by phone or send a questionnaire.

CONCLUSION

Historically, education has been responsive to the needs of our constantly changing society. Preparing our youth for a successful, orderly transition from the educational system to positions as contributing members of society is the major goal of education. Vocational education plays an important part in this process. In fact, participation in vocational education is the keystone to success in adulthood. For special needs students, vocational education provides them with the skills necessary for an effective transition from school to work.

There are a variety of approaches to providing special needs students with necessary skills. This publication has shown how vocational education can help these students to make a successful transition from school to employment. As vocational teachers, you have a wealth of knowledge and skills to contribute to the transition process for your special needs students. In addition, you have access to the help of other professionals, for neither vocational education nor special education can be successful without cooperative planning.

Figure 4. Vocational special needs student follow-up questionnaire.

Name: _____ Social security no.: _____

Address: _____ Telephone: _____

Graduate of: _____

Type of diploma: _____

Did you take any vocational career readiness courses in high school? If yes, which ones? Were they helpful in finding employment? If no, why not? _____

Where are you employed now? _____

Which courses did you find helpful? _____

What other courses would you like to have taken, if available, to help you in expanding or improving your job skills? _____

Have you used the services of the employment office or any other individuals or agencies outside your family in seeking a job? If yes, specify the types of services.) _____

Comments: _____

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